

RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA

In the Australian Commonwealth all the religious denominations are regarded as equal, so far as the federal and state governments are concerned, Western Australia being the last to abolish the system of state aid to religion. This was in 1895, when the sum of £35,450 was distributed among the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Wesleyan and Presbyterian bodies in place of the annual grants previously received by them; these being the only religious bodies receiving state aid, the others refusing to accept it. Out of the 3,771,715 professed adherents of Christian and other denominations in the Commonwealth, according to the census returns, no less than 3,283,622 belonged to the four bodies above mentioned, the remaining 488,093 comprising Baptists, Congregationalists, Lutheran members of the Salvation Army, Unitarians, and the like; 80,673 being individuals of no professed religious persuasion, or who objected to state their religious belief, or whose religion could not be ascertained, most of the latter being Asiatics and other colored aliens. In proportion to the number of population the hold of the various religious bodies on the Australian people may be regarded as being considerably stronger than in almost any other country.

The Anglican Church, which claims 1,497,579 members according to the census, has six archbishops, sixteen bishops, three vicars apostolic and one abbot nullius; the various cathedrals and leading churches being large, well built, handsome structures, equal in every respect to those found in Great Britain. The support afforded the Anglican Church has not been affected in the slightest by the withdrawal of state assistance, the number of its adherents having become increased between 50 and 60 per cent. during the last thirty years. The number of Anglican churches and buildings in which religious services are held is 3,412.

The Roman Catholics are the second largest religious body in the Commonwealth, numbering 855,799, the increase during the last thirty years being much in the same ratio as that in the Anglican Church. The leading dignitaries are a cardinal archbishop, coadjutor archbishop, five archbishops, twelve bishops, one coadjutor bishop and four vicars-general. There are 1,500 churches including several large and beautiful cathedrals, belonging to the denomination; also numerous convents, refuges, educational institutions and buildings devoted to religious and charitable purposes. There is also a large college, said to be the most extensive in the Commonwealth, near Sydney. The Wesleyans are stated to number 304,133, forming a united body in each state, also in New Zealand, collectively known as "The Methodist Church of Australasia." Delegates from each body attend a conference held every three years. There are 2,388 churches and 1,250 preaching places, the latter not including those in Queensland, of which no details are given.

The Presbyterians number 426,105, and possess 1,957 preaching stations, exclusive of those in Queensland. The strength of the other leading denominations is as follows: Baptist, 92,670; Congregational, 73,561; Lutheran, 75,021; Unitarian, 2,629; The strength of the Salvation Army has been roughly estimated at 34,000 in 1904. The headquarters of the Army are in Melbourne, and its head in Australasia ranks as a commissioner. He is directly responsible to General Booth, and controls the officers commanding in each of the states, who bear the rank of colonel or brigadier. Each state is divided into districts, which are placed in the charge

of superior officers; and each of these districts is subdivided into local corps under subaltern officers, assisted by secretaries, etc. These subaltern officers are responsible to the officers commanding their division, and the latter to the colonel or brigadier in charge of the army of the whole state.

The tendency in most of the denominations is in the way of maintaining a steady increase in the rolls of membership, corresponding with the increase of population, although at one time there was a marked falling off in the ranks of the Salvation Army. Everywhere the progress of religious effort is found accompanied by active exertion in the cause of social reform, and much useful work has been accomplished in this direction. It is a noticeable fact that many of the principal labor leaders are prominent members of religious bodies, taking their full share of preaching and Sabbath school work, and refraining from introducing their political views into their missionary labors. No reliable estimate has been formed of the annual cost of religious work in the Commonwealth, but it must be considerable, running into fully seven figures, every shilling being raised by voluntary effort, an encouraging illustration of the brighter and nobler side of Australian character.

THE MODERN BOARDING HOUSE

By Rev. John B. Pyke, M.A.

I have had an experience of boarding houses dating from my boyhood, chiefly in Montreal. I wish to draw the attention of the religious community to the fact that Christians in general, and the clergy in particular have not yet grasped the significance of the boarding house system; especially as it exists in large cities.

I believe that boarding house environment largely—perhaps chiefly accounts for losses in church membership, in some localities, and also partly, for that indifference to spiritual matters, irreverence in dealing with religious observances, and non-attendance at religious worship which prevails in all classes at present.

My remarks are happily not applicable to all boarding houses or families who take one, or more boarders, but they are true of the vast majority of such places.

Not only do a large proportion, perhaps a majority of young men and women in cities board, but at least eighty per cent. of middle aged people, have passed some period of their lives as paying guests in some large or small establishment; generally not at a period of life when the mind was peculiarly subject to receive impressions for good or evil.

How are young and for that matter older persons, living in boarding houses looked after by the church authorities of their own religious persuasion? Many young persons do not bear letters of introduction when they go to a strange city—Even when they possess such testimonials they often lack the courage, or initiative, to present them. Or if presented little or no notice is sometimes taken of such epistles; especially if their bearers live in large boarding houses, where they particularly need kindly hospitality and spiritual ministrations. If not visited soon they are not visited at all and their names not appearing in the city directory they easily escape notice. Boarding house-keepers are often not identified with any church, or are Roman Catholics, in either of which cases their Protestant guests not receiving the visits of their clergy or lay visitors, soon grow lax in attendance at religious worship, or perhaps they have never found the habit of going to church, or of attention to private prayer and Bible reading.

On the other hand the young man

or woman living at home is well looked after as a rule, by the family minister. Yet the young person who is boarding stands far more in need of attention, especially if a stranger to the city, and its life.

The arrangements, and accessories of ordinary boarding houses are not favorable to the cause of Christianity or conducive to church attendance. Grace is not said at meals, which are often served at hours incompatible with prompt appearance at the hour of service.

The table talk is seldom of an uplifting nature, especially if all the boarders are men, or the lady of the house does not preside at the repast. Even if she is present the discourse is generally of a light flippant description, and calculated to injure a mind in its plastic state. And such conversation cannot be checked or a better kind substituted, unless the hostess is a person of character and intellect above the average.

The Y.M.C.A., and Y.W.C.A., in Montreal and sometimes in other places, together with kindred institutions, do a little to provide suitable boarding accommodation. Their establishments however can receive but a minute percentage of the immense boarding population of a large city. Besides which people as a rule prefer private houses to institutions for residence.

The list of boarding houses furnished by Y.M.C.A. secretaries is sometimes helpful but it is seldom that the kindly official in charge has any personal knowledge of the boarding places on his list; and he generally accepts the statement of the boarding house-keeper without investigation. So that the place selected by the stranger may happen to be the worst one possible for a person of his tastes, and tendencies.

For myself let me state that I have lived for eighteen years in Montreal boarding houses, and of the hundreds of young Protestant men, and women I have met there I can remember but two persons who were visited by their ministers, and in both those cases their friends had asked that they be looked up. I do not suppose that in all those eighteen years I would ever myself have been visited had it not been that I came under a clergyman's notice before I left home, and since I have been ordained I occasionally am called upon by some minister on business. There are thousands of boarding houses in Montreal filled with Protestant men and women where no minister of the Gospel ever enters. Especially is this true of the French quarter, where hundreds of Protestants are to be found boarding with people of another race, and religion.

In conclusion let me add that the Roman Catholic Priests have (I am told) recognized the necessity of attending to this question of the non church attendance of the boarding population, and are I understand establishing boarding houses under their own supervision. It is said that Protestants are subscribing liberally to this project." Why cannot our clergy and laity originate some "Protestant Boarding House Institution" where strangers and those leading lonely lives may be brought under better, and more congenial influences?

I am willing to give further information on these subjects to any one who may wish to question me.

Sir William Mulock, who has just returned to Canada from the Pacific Cable Conference in London, states that he has no hope that the English Government will in the immediate future reduce the postage on papers and periodicals from the United Kingdom to the colonies. They consider that they cannot do this without at the same time equally reducing the domestic rate, and this would cause too serious a loss to the department.